



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE BELIEF IN IMMORTALITY

JAMES BISSETT PRATT

WILLIAMS COLLEGE

The individual's attitude toward the Determiner of Destiny, which is religion, has always an essentially practical coloring. It involves a belief, to be sure, but this belief is never a matter of pure theory; it bears a reference, more or less explicit, to the fate of the individual's values. Hence in nearly every religion which history has studied or anthropology discovered, the question of the future in store for the individual believer has been one of prime importance. The content of this belief is a question for the theologian and the historian of religion; the psychologist, however, may be able to throw some light on the related question *why* people believe, or fail to believe, in immortality at all. What, in short, are the psychological sources from which this belief springs, and what are the leading types of this belief?

If I may trust the data that I have collected in various ways upon this question, I may say briefly and at once, that faith in a future life seems as a rule to be based either (1) on primitive credulity, authority, and habit, (2) on reason, (3) on some form of feeling, or (4) on will.

With nearly all of us who are brought up in religious surroundings, belief in a life after death *begins* as a matter of authority and of primitive credulity. And with many a pious soul, untroubled by a disturbing critical faculty, the belief continues to be based on authority to the end of life. As nothing disturbs it and as it is nourished

rather than weakened by the only intellectual atmosphere to which it is exposed — namely the sermons of the pastor and a few religious books — it grows into a habit which finally becomes too strong to fear attack. With nearly every one of us, in fact, belief based on authority and habit is stronger than we are usually willing to admit. It forms the background of faith in immortality with many a man and woman who likes to think that some argument is the really decisive factor. At times of mental alertness the argument may stand forward as the great protagonist of faith; but when the mind grows weary, it is usually the tradition and the habit of childhood — always there in the background — which come forth as the really decisive forces.

I am inclined to think that belief in a future life is less often based upon argument than is belief in God. Certainly this source of faith in man's immortality contributes far less of strength than does any of the other three suggested above — at any rate if we take into account only its *direct* contribution. The arguments that men offer in support of their faith are in most cases of a negative sort, aiming to show that those who deny the eternal life are no more justified by logic and evidence than are the believers, and thus leaving the door open to faith if one wills to make the faith-venture. More positive arguments are sometimes given. To those who start out with the view that this is a moral universe or that there is a just God, the idea of death ending all seems incongruous and therefore untenable; the evils of this life must be righted somewhere and somehow, the good rewarded and justice done. So far as I can judge, however, this argument is less generally impressive than it was a generation ago. Probably the argument that is both most generally persuasive and logically the soundest consists in pointing out the essential difference between consciousness and its processes, on the one

hand, and the material world and its laws, on the other. This is, of course, the essence of the Platonic arguments, and nothing better is likely ever to be suggested.

The more deep-lying influences productive of faith in immortality are to be found in the realms of feeling and will. At first sight it may seem odd that feeling can give strength to a belief about the future; but on further reflection it will be plain that there is nothing at all strange about this. For the belief in question is not one of reasoning but of immediate feeling; and if an idea is vividly presented and is felt to be congruous with one's background sense of reality, it is *ipso facto* felt as real. Belief of this emotional type as applied to immortality is of various sorts. Many persons who feel it strongly are unable to analyse it, and can describe it only as a "feeling" or an "instinct," or by some other word which in its non-technical sense is sufficiently vague. In most cases it seems to be based upon a direct apprehension of the essential worth of the self; going back, I suppose, to the instinct of self-assertion — if indeed it does not go back farther than any instinct. The individual is conscious of inherent powers and purposes too great to be exhausted here, and feels that his own nature is such that the death of the body is irrelevant to its life. This is not an argument nor a demand, but an immediate sense that the death of the spirit is intolerably — almost ludicrously — incongruous with what one feels of indubitable reality within. This kind of belief is usually very strong, and has the added advantage of being at its strongest at exactly the times when it is most needed. It is not, however, for all, and I cannot say that those in whom it is the dominant type of faith form a very large class.

Far and away the largest of our four classes is the fourth — those, namely, whose faith is based chiefly on desire. The nature of this desire varies with different people. The fundamental as well as the most wide-

spread and influential form of it is simply the love of life as such, the instinctive impulse which normally makes men cling to life, however wretched they may be. In the words of Wijnaendts Francken, "The demand for self-preservation is one of our most powerful instincts; it transcends the tomb itself; for the desire for immortality is nothing else than one form of the search for self-preservation."¹ This sometimes expresses itself in instinctive horror at the thought of death — a point of view so vividly exemplified by many passages in the Book of the Dead. Horror at the destruction of the body, of course, plays no part in the desire for immortality today; yet dread of annihilation is with many still as strong as was fear of the tomb with the ancient Egyptian. If I may trust the replies of my respondents and Schiller's report of the responses to the S. P. R. questionnaire, the desire for eternal bliss seems to have little to do with the faith in question. Possibly I should mention one kind of happiness as an exception to this statement; for hope of reunion with one's friends is certainly one of the very largest factors in the desire for immortality. The demand for moral progress, for enlarged opportunity for service, and for a better chance for those who have had no chance here, are mentioned not infrequently by my respondents among the reasons why immortality is wished for. But quite as common as this desire for a future life on its own account is the demand that it shall exist in order to give meaning and significance to this life. Thus we are brought back again to that inherent demand for conscious life as such, for an endless continuation of spiritual opportunity, which is at the bottom of so much of the earnest desire for immortality. As we have seen, it is based upon an instinct — if indeed it be not ultimately based on something deeper still — and it manifests itself through all grades of spiritual development,

¹ *Psychologie de la Croyance en l'Immortalité*, Revue Philosophique, LVI, 278.

from the unthinking, organic fear of death, up to the longing of the artist, the philosopher, and the mystic.

Now for the other side. Having seen some of the psychological sources of belief in a future life, we may ask, What are the psychological influences involved in the doubt or denial of a future life? In a general way, of course, the answer is to be found in the absence of those causes which our study has shown us lead to belief. In the first place, we must recognize that a fairly large number of persons have no real desire for life after death. The causes of this indifference are not easy to ascertain with any degree of completeness or exactitude. Possibly some guidance may be found in a comparison of our times with the Middle Ages. The loss of desire for a future life in the last 500 years is due in part to the greater attractiveness of this world in our times and the increase of interests of all sorts which keep one's attention too firmly fastened here to allow of much thought being spent on the other world. As people cease to think about a future life it becomes less vivid to them and hence less an object of desire. The shattering of authority and the weakening in popular estimation of the arguments in its favor have also had the same tendency of making it seem less real and hence less genuinely longed for. For desire and belief are *mutually* helpful; not only does desire tend to beget belief, but some sort of belief in at least the possibility of the object is a condition of any real desire for it. In the 15th and 16th centuries men so desired the spring of perpetual youth that they were willing to risk all they had in the search for it. Youth is no less loved today, but it can hardly be said that anyone ardently desires to discover a spring whose magical waters would make it perpetual. We do not desire it as our ancestors did, because we no longer harbor it in our thoughts as a genuinely possible object of discovery. Other causes for the loss of desire for

immortality besides its lessening vividness are of course at work in various individuals — and always have been. Distaste for life in general, weariness, and dread of responsibility, tend to make one look forward to death as the definitive end with carelessness or even with longing.² Cases of this sort, however, are not common, and are probably little commoner today than in previous ages. The great cause of the loss of desire is the indifference described above, due to the disappearance of the vitality of belief.

I have no idea to what extent the change in the intellectual atmosphere of modern society has undermined emotional belief, but there can be no doubt that it has been the great factor in weakening belief from authority. And here the various arguments against human survival of death have been reinforced by all the rationalistic influences of every sort that have been steadily wearing away the authority of Bible, Church, and tradition these many years. Hence from several sides is borne in upon us the immense influence of thought in determining belief. This influence as it comes to bear upon the individual is largely indirect and largely negative, and for that reason when one studies the particular positive beliefs of individual men and women, thought seems to have a very second rate — or fourth rate — position. But when we take into consideration the movement of society during several centuries we see that the influence of thought (directly upon society and indirectly upon the individual) is of prime importance — something too often forgotten by the enthusiastic anti-intellectualism of our day. In fact, it would be a mistake to say that thought modifies

² Leuba sums up the causes for this loss of desire as he views them in the following words: "A weariness of existence, temperamental or the fruit of age or of other circumstances; a disposition to enjoy the mood that informs Bryant's noble poem, *Thanatopsis*; and especially, perhaps, an inability to picture in intelligible and acceptable form a future life, suffice to make of a death that ends all a satisfactory, even a desirable goal." (*The Belief in God and Immortality*, p. 301.)

the individual's belief only indirectly; for if we take into account its negative and destructive influence, its action is certainly direct enough. This destructive action of thought upon belief takes place more frequently and more easily today because of the psychological atmosphere that has been produced by the successive triumphs of natural science. Students of science are less likely to believe in immortality than others, not because the arguments against it are stronger than those for it, nor yet because they see the logical difficulties in the way of immortality more clearly than do those whose thought has been engaged chiefly in other lines, but largely because their training has produced in them a habit of regarding the scientific laws of the material world with the same sort of reverence that the old-fashioned Christian feels toward the teaching of Scripture. While scientists as a class are less likely to believe in the survival of bodily death than others, there are significant differences between different classes of scientists. Statistics indicate that over fifty per cent of the historians and physical scientists believe in immortality, while among the biologists and psychologists the percentage of belief is notably lower. This fact is undoubtedly due to the constant effort made by both the latter classes to view the phenomena of life and mind in terms of something like mechanical sequence; an effort which with some has become a habit, and by some is regarded as a presupposition of scientific procedure.

The truth is, non-belief, like belief, draws its strength not only from reason but from authority; in fact, for many enthusiastic students of science the will not to believe has a good deal to do with the result. In certain scientific circles it is not good form to believe in a future life; and the ascetic ideal which would sacrifice selfish interests for the personal values of science also comes into play. Moreover non-belief, like belief, is not merely a

product of logical argument, authority, habit, and volition, but is largely influenced also by the imagination; and the peculiarly objective point of view which natural science inculcates and the habit it produces of considering causation and the laws of matter universal and invariable, give a certain cast to the imagination which makes the idea of the survival of bodily death increasingly difficult.

This question of the imagination is most fundamental to the understanding of belief and disbelief. It is very difficult to believe earnestly in anything that we can in no way image to ourselves; and this general fact finds ample application and illustration in the field under discussion. Though no doubt there are exceptions, it is still a very general truth that those who deny a future life are those who find it impossible to imagine it in vivid and persuasive fashion; while they have few doubts on the subject who find little difficulty in imagining it and who perhaps would find it difficult to imagine death ending all. Belief and disbelief would therefore seem, in one sense, to be correlative to two types of imagination or two points of view from which the imagination regards the future life.

We can best get at these two types of imagination by contrasting two classes of persons who are known to have quite different views on the subject of immortality. Perhaps no large class of men are more given to a skeptical or even materialistic view on this subject than physicians; and probably none have more genuine faith in a future life than clergymen. Doubtless differences of opinion on authority and on the logic of various arguments have much to do with this difference of belief; but these things do not fully explain the contrast. The physician finds it hard to imagine, with any reality-feeling, life after death, while the clergyman finds it easy to do so. And the reason for this is largely to be found in the fact that

the physician tends to think of death from the point of view of the body, and that death means to him usually the death of some one else; whereas the clergyman views death more subjectively and from the point of view of the "soul." The physician takes the objective view of death. All his experience, his training, his daily work, his professional habits of thought, lead him to this. Inevitably death means to him the ceasing to function of certain vital organs. Thus it comes about that even when he thinks of his own death he pictures it also objectively — externally; he sees his body lying on a bed; his heart ceasing to beat, his respiration stopped. Those manifestations of life in which he is professionally interested he pictures at an end; and that *means* to him that life has ceased. As dies the beast, so dies the man — literally true from an external viewpoint certainly. As this habit of thought grows upon the physician or scientist, he finds it increasingly difficult to hold alongside with it the old view, taught him in childhood, that conscious life continues beyond the grave. To believe it might be logical enough, but he finds it very hard to imagine with any lively sense of reality.

The clergyman, on the other hand, thinks of death, as I have said, from the point of view of the "soul." Death means to him primarily *his* death; that is the type of death for him. He thinks of other people's death as meaning what his own death would mean. That is, he views death from the subjective, or, rather, the inner point of view. Very likely he knows little enough about the physiology of death: or if he is versed in this aspect of the case, it is not this primarily that he thinks about. Death means to him a form of subjective experience, not a physiological phenomenon. His whole training and his daily work enforce this view. As a result it is very easy for him to imagine a continuation of conscious existence after death; in fact, it may be difficult for him to

imagine the contrary. And of course not only is this true of ministers but it holds frequently of many other men whose thoughts are habitually occupied with the spiritual and inner side of life. Goethe is quoted as saying, "It is, to a thinking being, quite impossible to think himself non-existent, ceasing to think and live." This is the natural attitude of the untaught mind. It is with a tremendous shock of surprise that the child learns that he must some day die; and for a considerable time most children probably refuse really to believe it. The belief that life as a matter of course will not end seems to be almost as natural as the desire that it should continue. The idea that life will end may be logical but it is an acquired and secondary product.

"All men think all men mortal but themselves."

There are several reasons for this. For one thing, it is hard to think of the world continuing to run along and we not here to witness it. We are all incipient Berkleyans, at least to the extent that in our image of various external events there is usually, in the background of our minds, an implicit recognition of its relation or possible relation to us. We picture ourselves as the hidden beholders of all that we imagine. More important than this is the fact that the thought of one's self ceasing to exist is most difficult for the natural man, quite aside from his relation to the external world. Our past experience of consciousness is of a stream which, in spite of its temporary breaks in sleep, still seems to us really continuous and without conscious beginning or end. We have gone to sleep many times, but always to wake once more. *We have got into the habit of being alive.* Hence the association of non-being with ourselves is unnatural and difficult. Nor do past experience and the laws of association and habit explain the whole matter. Life somehow *feels* itself and *wills* itself to be end-

less — not explicitly, but by a violent reaction against the idea of extinction. To look at oneself objectively, from an exterior point of view, as one of those things which may cease to be, requires a considerable degree of sophistication, and both in the individual and in the race it is learned only with difficulty.

The two types of imagination that I have been describing — the external and the inner — are to be found not only in different individuals with different kinds of training; they may alternate within the same individual under varying circumstances. If I may take myself as an example, I find my own belief in a future life at its strongest when thinking of my own death. At such a time it is unnatural for me to take any but the subjective and inner point of view; so that the thought often gives me a kind of secret exhilaration such as one feels who sees his enemy in the distance and cries "Come on!" But when I see a person die I am sometimes very skeptical. I remember seeing a man run over by a train, and being surprised to find how hard it was for me to believe that the man's consciousness still existed or would ever exist again.

But difficulties connected with the imagination are responsible for another source of weakness in the belief in immortality, in addition to this objective and external mode of representation. Belief in an abstract truth, a truth which can be conceived but not imagined, is usually cold and lacking in that vividness which is the primitive touchstone of reality. The more concrete details that can be added to our mental picture, the more real does it become to us. This increased sense of reality through imagined details is the effect which the historical novel has — or should have — upon the reader. It makes Louis XI or Richard I real and living to us by supplying a host of concrete details which add the very warmth of life to characters that had been but names before.

Now it is the impossibility of surrounding the idea of the next world with any concrete details which are not themselves almost impossible, that makes the belief in question so hard for many to retain. If the departed really still have conscious existence, what are they doing? What are the conditions of their life? What are their employments and their pleasures? If we allow ourselves to ponder over these questions, most of us will find our notion of a future life taking on the color of a fairy tale. The questions, if we face them steadily, demand some kind of answer; and yet almost any conceivable answer that shall be put in vivid detail will make the belief all the more difficult. The historical attempts that have been made to picture the next world so as to give it the reality-feeling that comes from vivid images, have all had but very moderate and temporary success. From the *Book of the Dead*, through Virgil, Dante, Milton, down to *Gates Ajar*, the descriptions in our hymn books, and the latest revelations of the spiritualists, they all seem either mythical or puerile, so far as they are given in terms of detailed imagination. And the same thing surely is true of the *Book of the Revelation*. The Bible elsewhere on this point is wisely reticent. Jesus had no descriptive phrases for the life of heaven which were anything more than plainly symbolic. And his immediate followers perceived the wisdom of his example. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him."

For from the nature of the case, all the material for the details of another life must be drawn from this; and yet it is plain that if there is a future life (unless we adopt the conception of reincarnation), it must be in many of its details and surroundings very different from this. Hence the ascription to it of images drawn from this life strikes us as inharmonious and incongruous. The idea

therefore never gets dressed out in the details which are so helpful in imparting reality-feeling, and for most of us it remains always largely abstract and verbal. Hence the large number of people who, while not denying it, and even willing to say that they suppose they believe in it, are quite indifferent to it and never give it a thought. The imaginative difficulties in it are such that it resembles one of those small stars which can be seen only by indirect vision, and which disappear when looked at directly. Many people find that their belief in immortality is strongest when they think least about it.

There are two or three classes of people whose faith in a future life is not greatly affected by the difficulties we have been discussing. These are, in the first place, that small class of thinkers who have trained themselves to live so constantly in a world of concepts that lack of imaginative vividness is no loss. Much larger is the class of uncritical believers, whose faith is based upon authority, and who either find no difficulty in accepting the pictures in *The Revelation*, or else possess so strong a faith that difficulties in imagining a future life are powerless against it. A smaller but in many ways more interesting class are the mystics. For them the difficulties which others feel are not overcome but quite lacking. They will tell you that they cannot only conceive but imagine — or rather directly experience — what the future life will be, at least in its most important aspect. For them the most significant feature of that life will be its union with the Divine; and this is for them, they insist, no mere verbal phrase nor abstract idea nor pious hope, but a genuine and very real experience of this present life. People such as these need no detailed descriptions of how the dead are raised up or with what body they shall come. The details they can leave with perfect confidence for the future to reveal. The substance they already possess.

For the great majority who are not mystics, however, the difficulty of giving the future life any imaginative reality must always be a source of real weakness in belief. If they cling to the hope, they usually avoid any serious attempt to picture the details of the future life, either dodging the question altogether or refusing to take any suggested answer seriously. One of my respondents — a student of natural science, who yet hopes for and believes in immortality — writes: “To hold this faith without picturing the nature of the future life I find impossible; but I manage with ease and naturalness to keep those mental pictures in a flux, as it were, making them the poetry of my faith without giving them the definiteness which would challenge my own scientific criticism.” This man’s position is the wise one for most people who desire to keep their faith. Belief in a future life, like belief in God, is usually an *attitude*, a way of holding oneself in relation to the future, quite as much as a definable concept, and certainly more than a detailed picture. To try to turn it into the latter, either in oneself or in others, is surely not wise. “How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? Thou fool!”

These then are some of the psychological influences tending to weaken the belief in a future life. Having considered this general question, it may be of some interest to consider briefly the more special question of the weakening of this belief within Christianity. For that it is being weakened I suppose there is little doubt, and that it is being weakened more rapidly in western Christendom than in other parts of the world seems probable. One of the things that strikes one most forcibly on a visit to India — at least if I may trust my own experience — is the vitality of the belief in immortality among all classes of society except those that have come under Western influence. Not only does there seem to be comparatively

little theoretical skepticism on the subject; the belief seems to hold a vital place in the lives of a surprisingly large proportion of the people. The chief cause for this contrast is undoubtedly the fact already pointed out, that modern Western science tends both to destroy authority, undermine various ancient arguments in favor of immortality, and also induce a form of imagination distinctly hostile to this belief. I think, however, there are several additional factors which give Hinduism a certain advantage over Christianity in nourishing a strong belief in immortality. One of them is connected with the question of the imagination already discussed. The Hindu finds no difficulty whatever in imagining the next life, for his belief in reincarnation teaches him that it will be just this life over again, though possibly at a slightly different social level. I am inclined to think, moreover, that the Christian and the Hindu customs of disposing of the dead body may have something to do with this contrast in the strength of their beliefs. Is it not possible that the perpetual presence of the graves of our dead tends to make Christians implicitly identify the lost friend with his body, and hence fall into the objective, external form of imagination about death that so weakens belief in the continued life of the soul? We do not teach this view to our children in words, but we often do indirectly and unintentionally by our acts. The body — which *was* the visible man — is put visibly into the grave and the child knows it is there; and at stated intervals we put flowers on the grave — an act which the child can hardly interpret otherwise than under the category of giving a present to the dead one. And so it comes about that while he is not at all sure just where Grandpa is, he is inclined to think that he is up in the cemetery. Much of our feeling and of our really practical and vital beliefs on this subject, as on most others, is of course derived from our childhood impressions. And so it comes about

that this attitude toward the body and the grave is not confined to children. Says Agnes in Ibsen's "Brand" of her dead boy Alf, when her husband has reproved her for thinking tenderly of the little body in the grave:

“‘What thou sternly call'st the corse,
 Ah, to me, my child is *there!*
 Where is body, there is soul;
 These apart I cannot keep,
 Each is unto me the whole;
 Alf beneath the snow asleep
 Is my very Alf in heaven.’”

The Hindu is not likely to make this identification. The body of his lost friend is burned within a few hours after death, and the ashes swept into the river and forever dispersed. There is no body left and no grave in which he may center his thoughts of the departed. If he is to think of him at all, it cannot be of his body and must be of his soul. The Christian decks the tomb of his departed one with flowers; the Hindu instead performs an annual Shraddha ceremony to the spirits of those gone before.

But there is, I believe, one further reason for the greater strength of the Hindu faith over the Christian, and that is to be found in the contrast between the two conceptions of immortality. In the Christian view the soul's survival of death is essentially miraculous. The soul is conceived as coming into existence with the birth of the body, and the thing to be expected is that it should perish when the body perishes. This is prevented through the intervention, so to speak, of God, who steps in and rescues the soul and confers upon it an immortality which, left to itself, it could never attain. Thus it comes about that when the idea of supernatural intervention has been generally discarded, and even the belief in God as an active force outside of nature has been weakened —

as is the case all over western Christendom — there is little left to support the belief in the continued existence of the soul after the death of the body. In India all this is changed. The soul's immortality has there never been thought dependent upon any supernatural interference or miraculous event, nor even upon God himself. There are atheistic philosophers in India, but they are as thoroughly convinced of the eternal life of the soul as are the monist and the theist. For in India the soul is *essentially* immortal. Its eternity grows out of its very nature. It did not begin to be when the body was born, and hence there is no reason to expect that it will cease to be when the body dies. Existence is a part of its nature. If you admit a beginning for it, you put it at once out of the class of the eternal things, and are forced to hang its future existence upon a miracle. But for the Hindu "the knowing self is not born; it dies not. It sprang from nothing; nothing sprang from it. It is not slain though the body be slain."³

But while it is hardly to be questioned that the belief in immortality is less widespread with us than it is with the Indians, it would be a great mistake to regard it as a secondary and unimportant part of Christianity as Christianity is actually believed and felt and lived today. Christianity, like Hinduism, has always considered faith in immortality one of the essential aspects of religion. Not all historical religions have done this. The Old Testament made little of personal immortality, as did also the classical form of Paganism, while orthodox Buddhism of the "southern" type seems to deny it altogether. But Christianity has persistently and steadily put its emphasis upon this larger human hope. And if we base our judgment as to what Christianity believes, not on the aggregate of persons who inhabit Christendom

³ Katho Upanishad I. 1. I have discussed this question at greater length in my "India and Its Faith." Pp. 105-107.

but upon those Christians whom popular thought singles out easily as religious people, we shall find that the hope of eternal life is still one of the essential and characteristic elements of Christianity. The difficulties in the conception which I have pointed out are undoubtedly present, and the faith of many Christians is plainly weaker because of them. Yet in spite of these things faith in immortality is still a living and most important part of the Christian conviction.

I am aware that this is not the opinion of all who have studied the subject. Thus Dr. G. Stanley Hall writes: "As to *immortality* in the orthodox sense of the word, if men really believed that there was another life vastly better and more desirable in every way than this, the world would soon be depopulated, for all would emigrate from it, unless fear of the mere act of dying deterred them. At least all the strong and enterprising souls would go. But in fact even those surest of Heaven stay here to the latest possible moment, and use every means at their disposal not to graduate into the *Jenseits*, even though their lives in this world be miserable. Does not this show that belief in post-mortem life is a convention, a dream-wish?"⁴

The fallacy of the argument used in this quotation is presumably plain enough. The fact that people do not commit suicide is no proof that they do not believe in a future life, as Dr. Hall would have us think; it shows merely that the instinctive impulse for self-preservation, combined with the reiterated teachings of the Christian churches that suicide is a great sin, has strength enough to keep those who believe the other life is best still on this side, until it is God's will to take them. But aside from this psychologically sound explanation of the matter, and even if we were dealing with the (psychologically

⁴Thanatophobia and Immortality. American Journal of Psychology, October, 1915, p. 579.

quite impossible) cold intelligences that President Hall for the moment seems to believe in, the utmost that his test proves is that religious people prefer one life at a time; that no matter how fair the next life may prove to be, they prefer to postpone it till the hour comes and they are ripe for it.

The question of the intensity of belief in what Dr. Hall, in characteristic phrase, calls the "post-mortem perduration of personality,"⁵ is not to be settled in so simple a fashion. For many indifferent people it may be what Dr. Hall calls it — "a kiosk in Kamchatka, which believers have invested something in and fitted out with such comforts as they can" — "better fifty years of earth than a cycle of Heaven." But for many a religious soul — and for many more of them than Dr. Hall evidently supposes — the hope of eternal life is something truly vital and fundamental, something too sacred and profound to be treated intelligently in Dr. Hall's flippant phrases. It may be that my experience is untrustworthy, but certainly it has been my observation that among religious people the hope and belief in a future life are very central to their religion. The results of my questionnaire show the same fact, if they can be trusted to show anything at all. Among one hundred and forty-seven respondents, one hundred and thirty-one believed in a future life, as against sixteen who were agnostic. Of fifty-seven respondents to a question concerning the growth or decay of the belief, forty-five insisted that their faith in immortality was increasing, seven noticed no change, and five found a decrease. I should claim no value for these figures were it not that I believe my respondents to have been fairly representative religious people, and that the tone of their answers is quite in accord with what the figures indicate. The faith in immortality may be less widespread than the belief in a God, though this is

⁵ Educational Problems. New York; Appleton. 1911. Vol. I, p. 144.

doubtful. Leuba's figures would, in fact, indicate the contrary. All the different classes of American scholars whom he investigated, except the psychologists, were found to include a larger percentage of believers in immortality than of believers in a personal God.⁶ Whether this be true of the majority of mankind or not, certainly there is one sense in which the belief in immortality *means* more than the belief in a God. It is less a matter of theory and, when strong, is more personal and practical in its nature. It is far from being merely the continuation of a childish superstition, but, like the belief in God when this is normal, it changes and grows with the growing mind. My respondents may have exaggerated the increase of its strength with their maturing and advancing years, but their testimony is, I believe, trustworthy in so far as it indicates the steady increase of value that this faith has for life. To the religious man and woman this hope-faith becomes increasingly a part of his existence, a secret source of new courage and strength, as the years go by.

It is this essentially pragmatic value of the belief in immortality that I would stress in closing this essay. As the belief in miracles and special answers to prayer and in the interference of the supernatural within the natural has gradually disappeared, almost the only *pragmatic* value of the supernatural left to religion is the belief in a personal future life. In many advanced religious circles the Absolute is climbing the throne of Jehovah, and the idealistic universe which has taken the place of the old one, when examined closely, turns out to be just the materialistic universe with a new set of labels. In such a world only a minimum of pragmatic value is left to "God," and only the belief in human immortality is left us from all the ancient faith which taught that the religious universe was really different and had

⁶Op. cit. Chap. IX.

appreciably different consequences from the non-religious one.

If we affirm with Höffding that, from one point of view at least, "the essence of religion consists in the conviction that value will be preserved,"⁷ then surely the belief in human immortality is very central to it. In a very real sense, moreover, one may say that this faith is psychologically deep-rooted and psychologically justified. For it is based on the clear apprehension of a great truth and a great postulate. The truth is that value and conscious life are correlative terms, and that each is impossible without the other. The postulate is that spiritual life is different in kind from and essentially independent of the world of matter and its laws and operations. Intimately intermingled the two are, but the human spirit has always insisted that they are not identical, and demanded that they shall not be utterly inseparable. The faith in the immortality of man's spirit is the great expression of this postulate, and of the inherently idealistic demand of human nature that the values of the universe shall not wholly perish. In one sense therefore this faith is even more fundamentally human — as it has in fact been more widespread both in space and in time — than the belief in a personal God. For it is essentially humanity's belief in itself, its faith in the highest form of the spiritual life that it has known. The particular forms of this faith have varied with man's changing circumstances through the ages and inevitably will vary. But the fundamental demand for the continuance of conscious and rational life, somewhere and somehow, will pretty certainly last as long as men have ideals and hopes, and continue to take any attitude toward the Determiner of Destiny.

⁷ *The Philosophy of Religion*, p. 14 — et passim.